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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 111213751-2102-02]

RIN 0648-XC377

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Other Flatfish, Other Rockfish, Pacific Ocean Perch, Sculpin, and Squid in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; apportionment of reserves; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS apportions amounts of the non-specified reserve to the initial total allowable catch of Bering Sea Pacific ocean perch, Aleutian Islands other rockfish, Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) other flatfish, BSAI sculpin, and BSAI squid in the BSAI management area. This action is necessary to allow the fisheries to continue operating. It is intended to promote the goals and objectives of the fishery management plan for the BSAI management area.

DATES: Effective [insert date of filing for public inspection in the FEDERAL REGISTER] through 2400 hrs, Alaska local time, December 31, 2012. Comments must be received at the following address no later than 4:30 p.m., Alaska local time, [insert date 15 days after date of filing for public inspection with the OFFICE OF THE FEDERAL REGISTER].

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments on this document, identified by NOAA-NMFS-2012-0243, by any of the following methods:

- Electronic Submission: Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal www.regulations.gov. To submit comments via the e-Rulemaking Portal, first click the “submit a comment” icon, then enter NOAA-NMFS-2012-0243 in the keyword search. Locate the document you wish to comment on from the resulting list and click on the “Submit a Comment” icon on that line.
- Mail: Address written comments to Glenn Merrill, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region NMFS, Attn: Ellen Sebastian. Mail comments to P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802-1668.
- Fax: Address written comments to Glenn Merrill, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region NMFS, Attn: Ellen Sebastian. Fax comments to 907-586-7557.
- Hand delivery to the Federal Building: Address written comments to Glenn Merrill, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region NMFS, Attn: Ellen Sebastian. Deliver comments to 709 West 9th Street, Room 420A, Juneau, AK.

Instructions: Comments must be submitted by one of the above methods to ensure that the comments are received, documented, and considered by NMFS.

Comments sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered. All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on

www.regulations.gov without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address) submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible.

Do not submit confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive or protected information. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter “N/A” in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous). Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word or Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Obren Davis, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the (BSAI) exclusive economic zone according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (FMP) prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Regulations governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the FMP appear at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

The 2012 initial total allowable catch (ITAC) of Bering Sea (BS) Pacific ocean perch in the BSAI was established as 4,854 metric tons (mt), the 2012 ITAC of Aleutian Islands (AI) other rockfish was established as 485 mt, the 2012 ITAC of BSAI other flatfish was established as 3,200 mt, the 2012 ITAC of BSAI sculpin was established as 5,200 mt, and the 2012 ITAC of BSAI squid was established as 425 mt by the final 2012 and 2013 harvest specifications for groundfish of the BSAI (77 FR 10669, February 23, 2012). This includes apportionments of the non-specified reserve to BSAI other flatfish and BSAI squid in two separate actions (77 FR 46641, August 6, 2012 and 77 FR 44172, July 27, 2012, respectively). In accordance with § 679.20(a)(3) the Regional

Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, has reviewed the most current available data and finds that the ITACs for BS Pacific ocean perch, AI other rockfish, BSAI other flatfish, BSAI sculpin, and BSAI squid in the BSAI need to be supplemented from the non-specified reserve in order to promote efficiency in the utilization of fishery resources in the BSAI and allow fishing operations to continue.

Therefore, in accordance with § 679.20(b)(3), NMFS apportions from the non-specified reserve of groundfish 856 mt to the BS Pacific ocean perch ITAC, 85 mt to the AI other rockfish ITAC, 400 mt to the BSAI other flatfish ITAC, 550 mt to the BSAI sculpin ITAC, and 275 mt to the BSAI squid ITAC in the BSAI. These apportionments are consistent with § 679.20(b)(1)(i) and do not result in overfishing of any target species because the revised ITACs are equal to or less than the specifications of the acceptable biological catch in the final 2012 and 2013 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (77 FR 10669, February 23, 2012).

The harvest specification for the 2012 ITACs included in the harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI are revised as follows: 5,710 mt for BS Pacific ocean perch, 570 mt for AI other rockfish, 3,600 mt for BSAI other flatfish, 5,750 mt for BSAI sculpin, and 700 mt for BSAI squid.

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, (AA) finds good cause to waive the requirement to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth at 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) and § 679.20(b)(3)(iii)(A) as such a requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This requirement

is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as it would prevent NMFS from responding to the most recent fisheries data in a timely fashion and would delay the apportionment of the non-specified reserves of groundfish to the BS Pacific ocean perch, AI other rockfish, BSAI other flatfish, BSAI sculpin, and BSAI squid fisheries in the BSAI. Immediate notification is necessary to allow for the orderly conduct and efficient operation of this fishery, to allow the industry to plan for the fishing season, and to avoid potential disruption to the fishing fleet and processors. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of November 30, 2012.

The AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effective date of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This finding is based upon the reasons provided above for waiver of prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

Under § 679.20(b)(3)(iii), interested persons are invited to submit written comments on this action (see ADDRESSES) until [INSERT DATE 15 DAYS AFTER DATE OF FILING FOR PUBLIC INSPECTION WITH THE OFFICE OF THE FEDERAL REGISTER].

This action is required by § 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801, *et seq.*

Dated: December 3, 2012

Emily H. Menashes,

Deputy Director,

Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

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